

IMAGINEBLOOMINGTON STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY, AUGUST 14, 2013

Meeting summaries are transcribed in an abridged manner and no audio recordings are available. All Steering Committee meetings are open to the public.

Attendance:

Steering Committee Members: Jack Baker, Jason Banach, Dave Harstad, Nikki Johnson, Patrick Murray, Andy Ruff, Chris Smith, Steve Smith, Jan Sorby, Maggie Sullivan, Ron Walker and Carl Zager.

Others in attendance: Larry Jacobs, Jacqui Bauer (staff), Danise Alano-Martin (staff), Tom Micuda (staff), Nate Nickel (staff), Scott Robinson (staff).

Goal Setting for Group 3 Topics: Transportation, Economic & Sustainable Development and Government Services

Mr. Robinson opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and gave a brief overview of the remaining goal topics for discussion. He then introduced Ms. Alano-Martin to discuss some key elements of economic and sustainable development. She touched on local demographics, regional economy statistics and the importance of the Crane Naval Base. Ms. Alano-Martin also outlined the City's economic development philosophy, as well as the businesses and niche industries that are being sought for the community. Mr. Walker handed out some materials that were produced by the Bloomington Economic Development Corporation (BEDC). He explained that these materials profile the community and are given to prospective business looking to relocate. A brief promotional video that showcased Bloomington to these prospective businesses was also shown.

Mr. Robinson asked for thoughts and used the theme of Bloomington as a regional hub as a way to kick-start the discussion. Mr. Harstad said that the downtown is thriving, but properties on the westside and other areas of the city's periphery are seeing little to no growth. He felt that we should follow a strategy similar to Bedford or Linton by targeting manufacturing and other fields (outside of technology) for these areas. Ms. Bauer asked how this can be accomplished outside of the university area. Mr. Harstad provided details regarding building space needs, potential incentives to offer and possible types of industries to attract to the community. Discussion ensued regarding area communities that worked to attract defense contractors.

Mr. Murray was concerned about having an adequate skilled workforce that has the technical skills needed for today's industries. He cited Columbus, Indiana as a good example of technical training programs. Ms. Alano-Martin answered that Ivy Tech has programs available for technical training. Mr. Walker gave an overview of the planned "Innovation Corridor" for I-69. He also talked about the County's plans for promoting their westside TIF district. Mr. Steve Smith talked about the former ABB site and how it offered a great infill opportunity, but would require public assistance to overcome site challenges. He also said that we cannot assume downtown will continue to thrive because it has had challenges in the past. Only previous planning efforts and community support in the last 30 years kept downtown alive and healthy.

Mr. Micuda stated that the 2002 GPP lacked a strong economic strategy for the future and it was focused on an economic model that is no longer viable. Mr. Chris Smith said that attracting large employers will be required to grow an equitable economy. He also said that annexations and proper land-use planning for the westside will be important for our employment vision. Mr. Walker talked about the recent Hoosier Energy headquarters building as being a good example of corporate office opportunities. Ms. Sorby said that BEDC statistics and materials helped to attract Hoosier Energy and are important. Mr. Micuda outlined the City's annexation plans and potential sites for office parks and corporate office sites. Discussion ensued regarding specific location and building needs for prospective businesses.

Ms. Bauer asked about how to apply our community's unique attributes to suburban style office spaces. She said a goal could be to better tie in the westside with the rest of the community. Mr. Chris Smith said that city services and amenities are very important in addressing this. He also said that planning policies and transportation systems also limit neighborhood node opportunities. Discussion ensued on identifying future neighborhood node opportunities and the economic importance of the westside. Mr. Zager asked about employees living near the westside industries in years past. Mr. Walker said that he wasn't sure about specific numbers, but did provide current commuting statistics for Monroe County. Ms. Sorby talked about the importance of live-work space in the community. Mr. Chris Smith said that Whitehall Plaza could offer a good neighborhood node opportunity.

Mr. Harstad asked about the preferred features of industrial and office parks for Bloomington. He gave examples from Boulder, Colorado and Plainfield, Indiana. He said that we should not focus just on the downtown core, but also on suburban, office and corridor areas. Mr. Harstad said that improving these areas will help increase the community's tax base. Mr. Baker talked about design features of industrial developments in Columbus, Indiana. Mr. Robinson asked for thoughts regarding either the sustainability or tourism aspects. Mr. Ruff offered his perspective as an elected official. He stressed the importance of social equity and the need for economic development to improve the lives of residents, especially those of lower incomes. Mr. Ruff also said that the community may not deem certain types of industries as desirable and that I-69 may not bring as many economic benefits as originally believed.

Ms. Sullivan talked about potentially attracting green industries, such as solar panels, as well as prospects for green building incentives. She also felt that Bloomington could easily become a hub for local food production. Mr. Zager said that improved industrial areas on the westside can create residential and transportation impacts outside of the City's boundaries. Ms. Alano-Martin said that we need to ask if local workers have the necessary skill sets for the industries that we want to attract locally. If not, we will need to grow the skill set of our local workforce.

Mr. Baker said that the younger generation values green living concepts. He felt that our community can be ahead of the curve if those types of industries are specifically targeted. Discussion ensued regarding both workforce training for those not bound for college and the importance of retaining the community's current businesses. The importance of the community's amenities was highlighted as a key factor in achieving business retention. Discussion focused on amenities such as the arts, a vibrant downtown and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Mr. Robinson closed by reminding the Steering Committee that the next meeting is scheduled for August 28, at which time we will focus on the topic of Government Services. Ms. Sorby suggested that we continue discussing tourism at the beginning of the next meeting.